

Kenneth Burke on Motion and Action:

The Problem of Dualism

“Language as symbolic action”: Burke uses this famous phrase as shorthand for the theory that language is a mode of doing something in the world, rather than simply a means of representing it.¹ Both the phrase and the theory behind it are foundational to much of Burke’s work, yet not until late in his career did Burke begin discussing symbolic action as one half of a pair of terms: the other term, of course, is “nonsymbolic motion.”² In “Dramatism and Development,” a little-known essay published in 1972, Burke described the relationship between motion and action by noting that “things move, people act.”³ This phrase, although pithy and memorable, seems to indicate a fairly simple distinction. Elsewhere, Burke implies that motion and action are a self-sufficient, binary set of terms.⁴ Any impression of simplicity or sufficiency is belied, however, by the profusion of critical commentary explaining and extending Burke’s discussion of nonsymbolic motion and symbolic action.

Burke’s best-known explanation of motion and action is his essay “(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic)Action” (1978, hereafter NMSA).⁵ A collection of fragments and tangents, NMSA seems to have been more a source of confusion than clarification for those interested in understanding the relationship between motion and action. Scholars of rhetorical theory have offered various explanations and extensions of Burke’s motion/action concept, most of which posit a “middle term,” a third theoretical concept which would represent the intersection, connection, or even overlap of motion and action. Few critics have noted Burke’s discussion of “attitude,” which he describes as “the point of mediation between the realms of nonsymbolic motion and symbolic action” (*Attitudes Toward History* 394), and which could easily be read as his own version of a “middle term.”⁶

Burke revised and re-articulated his theory of motion/action in a number of essays, both before and after the publication of NMSA. In 1976, immediately prior to the appearance of NMSA, Burke wrote a review essay that analyzed and critiqued J. L. Austin's book, *How To Do Things With Words*.⁷ That review essay, "Words As Deeds" (WD), suggests a number of parallels between Austin's work and Burke's own, including the strong distinction they draw between the connotations of a speech-act (symbolic action) and the phenomenal consequences of that speech-act (nonsymbolic motion).⁸ Given this distinction, we must ask two basic questions: did Burke intend motion and action to have a dualistic, binary relationship? If so, what would the practical result be of a dualistic interpretation of motion/action?

Burke's extensive exegesis of Austin's speech-act theory resolves the confusion surrounding the motion/action theory in several ways; more specifically, a study of WD offers three major conclusions. First, by developing the term "nonsymbolic motion" as a complement to "symbolic action," Burke places specific emphasis on the role of the physical world in interpretation and language use. Second, despite the misgivings of some scholars, the theory of motion/action is unabashedly dualistic. Third, WD provides an illustrative example of how motion/action functions as a descriptive and interpretive model, and clearly demonstrates the role of "attitude" in that dualistic system.

Burke's Terms

Burke casts motion and action as a simple set of terms in a binary relationship with one another.⁹ The realm of motion is that of the physical, encompassing all things in the world, a reality that predates (and will outlast) humankind. The realm of action is linguistic or conceptual; action is equivalent to "meaning," the site of intellect and culture. Barbara Biesecker suggests, for

example, that on the surface “nothing could be more simple” than this “pivotal distinction” (25) between motion and action. Burke himself simplified motion/action in many of the early contexts in which he brings them up. Specifically, he establishes three basic rules according to which this ontology always functions, and attaches those rules to many of his descriptions of motion/action:

- a) There is no Action without Motion
- b) There is Motion without Action
- c) Action is not reducible to Motion

In practice, these rules simply mean that any discussion of human events in these terms will make a distinction between the physical world (temperature, light, the density of matter, the cells of the human body) and the human mind (thoughts, emotions, dreams, etc.). The first two rules are often used to establish motion as a precondition for, but not necessarily a significant contributor to, the production of symbolic action. If humans were to disappear tomorrow the physical world would still exist, while if the physical world ceased to be, human thought (the intangible and abstract) would cease with it. The third precept is Burke’s response to Behaviorism (a major school of thought in psychology and the life’s work of B. F. Skinner, a contemporary of Burke’s). By rejecting the assumption of simplistic, reductive causality between the two realms, Burke suggests that not all behavior can be predicted from the environment surrounding it, that the physical realm does not determine the mental.

In Burke’s 1977 essay, “(Nonsymbolic)Motion/(Symbolic)Action” (NMSA), he makes repeated reference to the work of Descartes, the opposition of physical and conceptual worlds, and the “difference in kind” between motion and action (814). Burke begins the essay with the following explanation of the title:

This is the basic polarity (like the traditional pair *res* and *verba*, things and the words for things). It's at the root of such distinctions as mind-body, spirit-matter, superstructure-substructure, and Descartes' dualism, thought and extension. I say "at the root of such distinctions" though no such terms quite match the motion-action pair. (814)

Burke references the concept of polarity several times throughout the essay; he suggests, for instance, that "when to the principle of individuation (involving the underlying physiology of sheer motion) there is added an organism's ability to parallel the realm of sensations by learning to use *words* for them, the concept of Self must necessarily be defined in terms of *polarity*" (814). In many ways, however, Burke's insistence that there is an absolute split between the realms of motion and action is one of the most puzzling aspects of NMSA. Recurrent references to polarity must be balanced against Burke's constant implication that the realm of symbolic action is based in, and dependent on, nonsymbolic motion. If the two concepts are polar, then presumably the two are in opposition somehow, they push against each other. In a direct comparison to mind-body dualism, however, Burke suggests that while Descartes' "speculations on a possible bridge between his polar realms of 'thought' and 'extension'" led him to "the pineal gland" as a possible medium, "for an intermediate step between the realms of 'motion' and 'action' we need not look for so recondite a locus" (811). Burke seems to be suggesting, in turns, that motion and action are polar, opposed, qualitatively different, and also connected, causally related, and inseparable.

The confusion surrounding the relationship between these terms has direct, practical consequences for interpretation. When analyzing a particular text or utterance in the context of motion and action, one would presumably wish to know where one ends and the other begins. If

the ambient temperature on a hot summer's day causes body heat to rise and quarrels to break out, how is the anger or irritation caused by the heat different from the physiological response? Are they different at all? Given Burke's description, motion clearly must be a component of action, a part of it: motion is required for action to occur. Burke also implies that the two realms are (to a certain extent) mutually causative: not only do motions lead to actions, but the opposite is true as well. My irritation is caused by the heat, but my irritation (or any other mental state) can also cause changes in the realm of motion (e.g., my stress over looming deadlines causes my hair to fall out). Yet Burke's insistence that action is not reducible to motion, that there is a difference "in kind" between the two, suggests that the distinction must be attended to. How, then, are motion and action opposed? If they are easily connected with an "intermediate step," what would that step be and what would it mean?

Burke articulates two concepts in relation to motion/action that provide possible, if contradictory, answers to this question. The first is "duplication." A seldom-mentioned twist in the motion/action theory, duplication appears near the end of NMSA as an explanation of motion and action's mutual causation. The idea stems in part from the argument that "the realm of what is usually called 'ideas' is constructed of symbolic material usually called sensory 'images'" (815). Similarly, Burke suggests that bodily motion is mirrored by symbolic action, such that, for instance, our words will reflect changing hormone levels in our bodies (adrenaline, e.g., or another mood-altering bio-chemical). The causal connection between motion and action is here presented as a result of a "mirroring" process that Burke does not ever fully describe. As a theoretical addition to motion and action, duplication seems designed to elide a discussion of the interaction between the two realms. If action simply mirrored motion, there would need be no point of connection between the two. Burke's incomplete explanation of duplication, however,

does not answer many of the questions raised initially about the relationship between our two main terms.

The second possible answer Burke gives to the possibility of an “intermediate step” between motion and action is the term “attitude.” In the 1983 afterword to his *Attitudes Toward History*, Burke confirmed that attitude is “the point of personal mediation between the realms of nonsymbolic motion and symbolic action” (ATH, 394). Burke goes on to suggest that “our notions of ‘reality’ amount to a tendentious though unstable complex of ‘personal equations’ that are implicit in such a simultaneously unique and socially infused ‘orientation’” (ATH, 394). The implication of Burke’s use of “attitude” seems to be that subjective experience is a combination of social influence and empirical knowledge of the world, and Burke’s term for that mixture is “attitude.” He does not explain how such a combination comes about, however; nor does he suggest how such an amalgamation could bring together the two opposing, “polar” elements of motion and action.

Burke’s most famous example of “attitude” at work, from *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (1941), is the story of a man who goes to the dentist. Although the man is outwardly calm, the dentist remarks that he must have been very nervous because of the way his saliva thickened in his mouth. Thus, Burke suggests, although the man was “‘dancing an attitude of calmness’ on the public level, as a social façade, on the purely bodily or biological level his salivary glands were ‘dancing his true attitude’” (11). The attitude here is something to be represented or manifested, or as Burke would put it, “danced.” The saliva is not the attitude itself, but merely a by-product of it. In NMSA, though, Burke suggests that

though any attitude, even in purely theoretic matters, has a summarizing, unifying aspect, it must prevail only insofar as in some way it is grounded in purely

physiological behavior (as per William James' charming and often quoted statement that we're sad because we cry) (816).

NMSA does not actually describe the degree to which the two realms do or do not interpenetrate, barely hinting at the fact that the term "attitude" might be relevant to such a discussion. Burke points out that

whatever the implications of an ATTITUDE, as a kind of incipient or future action, it must be by some means grounded in the set of the body now; and thus, though an *attitude* of kindness may be but the *preparation* for the doing of a kind of *act* (a subsequent mode of behavior), it is already 'behaving' physiologically in ways of its own.... (816)

Burke develops his use of "attitude" in this passage from I.A. Richards' definition of the term as a form of "incipient action," a bodily preparation for activity prompted by nonphysical stimuli. Richards describes his experience of reading a book about a man being bitten on the head by a caterpillar, during which Richards is startled from his chair by a leaf falling on his head. The alarm caused by his reading material lead to a physiological reaction, a preparedness for flight (or some similar reaction) that was caused by symbols on a page. "Attitude," as described in NMSA, has connections both to symbolic action and bodily motion, although how exactly that functions is left unclear. Indeed, given the history of Burke's use of "attitude," such a claim might seem surprising.

For most of Burke's career, the term "attitude" was firmly associated with the concept of symbolic action alone. In *Grammar of Motives*, Burke's "attitude" was something that would "modify [an individual's] ways of action," something to be "complexly erected atop the purely biological motives" (237). Sarah Mahan-Hayes and Roger Aden point out that, over the course

of his career, Burke provided numerous terms as synonyms for attitude: motive, orientation, disposition, strategy, and state of mind, to name only a few (32-35). By linking attitude to such terms, often completely divorced from physical causes, Burke emphasizes the intangibility of attitude.

Burke's later insistence on the primacy of motion in the motion/action pair, and his assertion that attitude should be linked at least as closely with motion as with action, indicate an elaboration on his original theoretical stance, one that has until now gone unnoticed. More important for our purposes, though, Burke's conception of attitude as referring to both motion and action suggests some of the difficulties involved in defining these seemingly simple terms.

Dialectics and Middle Terms

The confusion surrounding motion's entanglement with action, and the apparent dualism resulting from their separation, has given rise to a number of attempts at explaining the role of this dichotomous pair in Burkean theory. Two similar arguments are often made about motion/action: first, many Burke scholars provide new explanations of motion and action, suggesting (for instance) that the relationship between motion and action is "dialectical." Second, many critics cast the theory of motion/action as incomplete; they then proceed to come up with their own additions (usually in the form of a "middle term"), without fully acknowledging Burke's own struggle to define these concepts throughout his career.

The idea that the relationship between motion and action is dialectical has become embedded in many of the critical discussions of this theory, despite the conspicuous absence of the term "dialectical" from most of Burke's writing on the subject. Barbara Biesecker points out that motion and action "are both irreducible"; that is, "neither action nor motion can be

understood as ultimately dominated, absorbed, or subsumed by the other in the moment of the act” (27). As a result, according to Biesecker, we cannot consider “their relation as dialectical in the Hegelian sense of the term” (28). Nevertheless, “dialectical” vocabulary is constantly associated with motion and action, not least by Biesecker herself: she uses the “action/motion differential” to claim that “the human being is ... first and foremost a dialectical animal” (29). Robert Heath claims only that “the concept of symbolic action has ‘dialectical possibilities’” (133), and Bryan Crable “stresses the dialectical relationship between the two terms” (122).

Burke uses the word “dialectical” only once in NMSA, to describe the relationship between Self and Culture (the terms he was originally asked to organize the essay around). While there are certainly similarities between the Self/Culture pair and the motion/action pair, the two sets of terms do not appear to be synonymous, and there is no indication that Burke would endorse an interpretation of motion and action as “dialectically” related. The widespread use of a possible “dialectical” relationship, as a means of avoiding the inherent dualism of motion and action, is unsupportable. Burke does not explain the theory of motion/action in dialectical terms, despite repeatedly attempting to explain the relationship of one term to another.

As an alternative means of negating Burke’s dualism, critics often add a third term to the motion/action duo, suggesting that the two terms alone are not sufficient. Karen Foss and Cindy White argue that “Burke does not have a specific label for the in-between realm” (101) created by the opposition of motion and action, and that one “consequence of Burke’s not naming the ground between animality and symbolicity or action and motion is that a hierarchy is established that privileges the symbolic realm” (101). Aligning themselves with “many feminist theorists,” Foss and White propose “the notion of ‘being’ as an alternative” term, one that “mediates between Burke’s end point terms [motion and action]” (102). They claim that this

terminological shift results in the “overcoming [of] the duality between motion and action,” as well as the creation of

a range of terministic implications that emphasize the rhetorical essence of those moments that are characterized by harmony rather than strife. Moreover, in challenging the assumption that disagreement animates change while persuasion accomplishes it, being calls into question the consequent assumption that controversy is the most important and fruitful area of rhetorical study (109).

Foss and White’s revision of Burkean theory attempts to resolve the tension between motion and action by removing the very notion of tension from the available interpretive options.

Barbara Biesecker’s treatment of motion/action does not initially appear to resemble Foss and White’s “third term” solution. Biesecker suggests that “the relation of action and motion is one of pure difference that cannot be annulled by a controlling or willing subject” (28). Such a position does not, however, preclude her suggesting that, “motive is the name for the structural differential [the motion/action difference] that is the condition of possibility for the historical emergence of the human being in a world” (29). For Biesecker, the importance of motion and action as a theory lies in precisely the “structural differential” that is the relationship between motion and action. Indeed, not only is that difference “the pivotal conceptual distinction out of which Burke later develops an ontology” (26), it also “constitutes the economy of the subject.” In other words, Biesecker uses the idea of “motive” to summarize the interaction between motion and action, making one of the most important terms in Burkean theory another third-term substitute designed to negate dualism.¹⁰

The critical reactions to motion and action noted in this section are not a comprehensive survey of the field. My goal is not to demonstrate that *all* of the scholarship on motion and

action has been mistaken, but rather that there are still popular misunderstandings of Burke's position. Biesecker's use of "motive," and Foss and White's "being," are attempts at correcting the dualism of this Burkean theory. Other Burke scholars though, particularly Greig Henderson (1988) and Timothy Crusius (1999), have acknowledged Burke's dualism. Henderson organizes much of his book (*Kenneth Burke: Literature and Language as Symbolic Action*) around the concept of dialectical relationships, but does point out that "at times Burke talks more dualistically and less dialectically than my interpretation implies" (138). He goes on to qualify his description of Burke's dualism, though, suggesting that

From an ontological point of view, then, an absolute duality of realm is implicit in Burke's definition of man as the symbol-using animal. From an existential point of view, the individual being, despite the obdurate centrality of his own nervous system, has no nonsymbolic access to the structure of reality and must live perforce in the fog of symbols where self and person, action and motion, animality and symbolicity ambiguously intersect. (140)

Henderson makes very clear that, while Burke subscribes to a dualistic ontology *in theory*, in practice he is not a dualist at all.¹¹ More than ten years after Henderson's comments, Timothy Crusius takes a similar stance, suggesting that

Burke insists on the *practical value* of dualism as a way of avoiding reductionism—not the same thing, of course, as proposing a dualistic metaphysics. Burke's defense of dualism occurs in the context of anthropology, not metaphysics. He defends dualism as an approach to human being, not as a necessary postulate about existence generally.

Crusius, like Henderson before him, offers a deft reading of Burke's dualism that simultaneously acknowledges the clarity of Burke's metaphysical stance, and yet denies the practical effects of a dualistic system. Neither Henderson nor Crusius, however, address Burke's use of the term "attitude" in relation to the motion/action duality.

Critiques of, and explanations for, Burke's dualism would carry more weight if they acknowledged Burke's description of "attitude" as a "point of mediation between" motion and action (*Attitudes Toward History*, 394). This particular use of "attitude" is, admittedly, not obvious in much of Burke's work. His first mention of a connection between attitude and the motion/action binary appears late in his career, published in the afterword to the 1984 edition of *Attitudes Toward History*. Burke's use of "attitude" in this context is not arbitrary, however, and should not be ignored. As a regrettable consequence of this theoretical point's relative obscurity, a number of questions remain regarding how attitude relates to motion and action. Did Burke intend for "attitude" to indicate a point where the realms of motion and action merge? What does the addition of "attitude" mean for the use of motion/action as an interpretive or explanatory theory?

Austin and Burke

Burke had not read *How to Do Things with Words* prior to 1976.¹² Indeed, Michael Hancher (the editor of *Centrum*) wrote to Oxford University Press to request a copy of the book on Burke's behalf; Burke did not have a copy of his own.¹³ Hancher, after hearing him lecture in Minnesota, asked Burke if he would read Austin's book and "place him in the perspective of your work."¹⁴ The result of Hancher's request appears to be that Burke took pains to compare Austin's concepts and terms to his own. Much like Austin himself, Burke focuses on the

boundaries and limitations of the speech-act terminology. As he walks the reader through his summary of Austin, Burke translates many of Austin’s concepts and terminology into language more closely related to his own work. The most important terminological shifts are as follows:

Austin	Burke
Performative	Dramatistic
Constative	Scientistic
Examples	Representative Anecdotes
Perlocutionary Force	Consequences
Illocutionary Force	Attitude

Except for these few, Austin’s terms are fairly easy to understand, or else they are of little importance to the issues discussed in this article.

“Words As Deeds” is certainly a foray into Austin from “the perspective of [Burke’s] work,” but the essay is not a simple translation of ideas from one terminology to another. Indeed, the primary purpose of Burke’s comments on Austin seems to be to re-examine the motion/action theory and its relationship to the third Burkean term mentioned above, “attitude”: “as a kind of ‘work in progress’ on my part, I want to see what might be done by a view of ‘illocutionary force’ as a synonym for ‘attitude’” (WD 153). Through an examination of Burke’s treatment of “illocutionary force,” and more generally his discussion of the relationship between Austin’s terms and his own, we can better understand the relationship of “attitude” to motion and action.

At first, Burke’s discussion of Austin’s work appears to be a curious assemblage of texts and topics. While Austin is ostensibly the main focus of this essay, several of Burke’s arguments seem hard to relate to its purported purpose: to put Austin in the “perspective” of Burke’s work. Burke mentions, in a letter to Malcolm Cowley after he had finished writing WD, that “I got there [i.e., to his, stance regarding Austin’s Speech Act Theory] via Malinowski, Richards, Mead, and me (after having taken weeks to find out that if I didn’t sweep in from the side, Austin

could continually get me sidetracked).” Burke does begin his essay with an extended comparison between Malinowski and Austin, and uses several quotations and terms from his own work to set the context for Austin’s work. His method of “sweeping in from the side” is not, however, nearly as random or bizarre as it might appear.

Burke’s heterogenous arguments and examples gain coherence when they are seen as explaining the role of motion/action in Austin’s theoretical framework. By setting his terms next to Austin’s, Burke raises questions concerning Austin’s discussion of the “consequences” of speech, using motion and action to illuminate the boundaries of Austin’s categories. Burke’s corrections of Austin suggest that the importance of motion in the analysis of speech acts has been underestimated, both by Austin and by modern Burke critics.

Many of Burke’s corrections of Austin stem from differences in terminology. As Burke scholars might expect, Austin’s terminology gives rise to his philosophy as a whole: the terms he uses are the filter through which he understands the phenomena he analyzes. Austin uses two different sets of three terms to describe the phenomenon of the speech act, and as a result he ends up with two three-part descriptions. Burke places those terms “in the perspective of” motion and action, and in doing so he explores the ways in which “attitude” could be used as a supplement to the original theory. Specifically, Burke explores the boundaries of Speech-Act Theory in a Motion and Action framework: when is verbal utterance in the realm of motion, when in the realm of action, and when does it cross from one to the other? Are the two realms separate or connected? Burke’s explanations of Austin’s terminology set up the answers to those questions.

The first triad of terms that Austin proposes consists of phone, pheme, and rheme. Meant as categorical descriptions for the parts of a given “locution” (a term addressed below), an utterance could thus be described as phonetic, phatic, or rhetic (or all three).¹⁵ Phone describes

any sound or vocalization, of the type used in verbal communication, but not necessarily attached to any meaning (thus it is in the realm of motion: a phone is simply the vibration produced by the movement of vocal cords). The pheme represents words, noises that are “belonging to ... a certain vocabulary, conforming to ... a certain grammar” (Austin 95). The pheme occupies an in-between role, in that it has some type of meaning, but it remains context-less. To illustrate the differences between these first two terms, Austin points out that “if a monkey makes a noise indistinguishable from ‘go’ it is still not a phatic act” (96). While the phone is noise, the pheme “is a unit of language” (98) and the monkey is not using it as such; the rheme, however, the third term, “is a unit of speech” (98).

The rheme involves the use of those words “with a certain more-or-less definite sense and reference” (Austin 95). Austin distinguishes the phatic and rhetic uses of language by labeling the former as the simple report of a thing being said (he said “go to the park”) and the latter a description of meaning (he told us to go to the park). Burke suggests that “the mere noise of words (phones) is related to their role as speech acts (phatic acts, rhetic acts) as the realm of nonsymbolic motion is to the realm of symbolic action” (WD 155), but he does not pursue the connection. Austin considers phones nothing more than a medium through which speech acts occur, but Burke’s analysis of Austin’s later terms suggests a different explanation. If the sound of a given word, the physical act of saying it, shapes its meaning to some extent, the next obvious question is how does one measure the influence of the phonetic on the rhetic? Rather than treating the physical aspects of speech as mere preconditions, which don’t influence the outcome of a given utterance, Burke implies that quantitative analysis of physical influences could give insight into the abstract, persuasive power of speech. Neither Burke nor Austin go into much depth concerning the role of motion in the phone, pheme, and rheme, however; their

second set of terms fits into a much more comprehensive vocabulary, which allows for a discussion of motion and action as the limits of speech acts.

While there is nothing wrong with the terms themselves, phone, pheme, and rHEME are classifications for the actions of a single symbol-using organism, an individual. Speech acts are often interactions between individuals though, exchanges of information and appeals for support or agreement or a certain response. Austin's analysis focuses heavily on linguistic and social convention, and the second triad of terms that Austin employs (made up, of course, of locution, illocution, and perlocution) demonstrates that focus. These three terms seem to map out the terrain of a speech act, especially the ways in which any speech act implies an attempt to alter the (perceived) reality of other individuals. Locution is defined as the saying of words that belong to a given language (or symbol system). Illocution describes the fitting of those words to social conventions and other intangible forces that give the utterance their meaning and force. Perlocution describes the consequences or effects of such a speech act. For example, saying "get out of bed" is a locution. The phrase's illocutionary force is its function as a warning, or as an order; illocution refers to the social contracts speech acts invoke and draw meaning from. The perlocutionary aspect of such a speech act is determined by what happens to the audience/what the audience does in response to the illocution; by warning you that you should "get out of bed" I might startle, annoy, persuade, frighten, or amuse you.

Both Burke and Austin are expressly concerned with descriptions of what Austin calls perlocution. As Burke points out, Austin addresses the split "between an action we do (here an illocution) and its consequences" (Austin 111) by suggesting that, unlike with "physical acts," "with acts of saying something, the vocabulary of names for acts (B) seems expressly designed to mark a break at a certain regular point between the act (our saying something) and its

consequences (which are usually not the saying of anything)” (112). Burke seems to question whether “perlocution” is even part of the speech act at all, pointing out that “the illocutionary act ... encounters a boundary beyond which a speech act cannot pass without ceasing to be a mere speech act” (160). Burke goes on to suggest that the “boundary” is Austin’s discussion of “consequences,” the effect or impact of a given speech act.

The importance of the audience, of other individuals, becomes readily apparent with Burke’s insistence that perlocution is necessarily affected by motion. For Burke, in this context, the individual should be considered the “human body in physiological motion, each with the centrality of its particular nervous system whereby, however its pleasures and pains might resemble the pleasures and pains of other such bodies, it immediately experiences only its own” (WD 161). Motion here is ultimately a dividing line, a “principle of individuation” by which human beings are kept isolated from each other. Indeed, Burke points out that “the mere fact that I have a pronounced attitude towards something and want you to share it with me is no guaranty at all that my way of expressing the attitude will be the best way of getting you to share the attitude” (WD 165). The suggestion seems to be that rhetoric is, in some ways, an activity that cannot yield definitive results, that can barely even reach past the boundaries separating individuated selves from each other. This emphasis on the separation of bodies from one another seems gloomily to diminish the possibility of human inter-connection through language.

Burke foregrounds his uncertainty about the sharing of attitudes through Austin’s classification of “persuasion.” He claims to be “jolted” that Austin calls persuasion a type of perlocution (an effect or consequence of speech), rather than an illocution (an action that accomplishes a certain symbolic goal as defined by prevalent speech conventions). Burke goes on to point out that, given Austin’s classification, “a wholly accurate title for Aristotle’s text [the

Rhetoric] would be something like ‘The Art of Trying to be as Persuasive as One can’” (WD 158). Burke is suggesting here that Austin’s terminology points to what we might call a post-modern failure of language, as exemplified by the split between speech and the spoken-about (in the vocabulary of deconstruction: the sign and the referent).

Austin makes a firm distinction between illocution and perlocution, pointing out that “we have then to draw the line between an action we do (here an illocution) and its consequences” (111). Although both phenomena are a result of locution, Austin tries to make the distinction reflect a logical separation of actions done by an agent and the effects of those actions on the world. Burke points out, however, that Austin makes a similar distinction with regard to illocutionary acts alone:

In the case of illocution we must be ready to draw the necessary distinction, not noticed by ordinary languages except in exceptional cases, between (a) the act of attempting or purporting... to perform a certain illocutionary act, and (b) the act of successfully achieving or consummating or bringing off such an act. (Austin 105-106)

Austin’s statement implies that not only is attempting to perform an illocutionary act unlike actually doing so, but the latter action alone should be understood as true illocution. In arguing that illocutionary acts must involve an interaction between speaker and audience. Austin claims that “I cannot be said to have warned an audience unless it hears what I say and takes what I say in a certain sense” (116). If the completion of an illocutionary act depends on the way in which the audience receives (read: interprets) the speech act, the means of that reception becomes much more important.

Burke suggests, at several points throughout “Words as Deeds,” that attitude is equivalent to Austin’s “illocutionary force.” Illocution, as has been explained in the previous section, is roughly equivalent to the socially constructed “function” of a given speech-act, the type of non-physical “action” that is highlighted by Austin’s discussion of “performatives.” Illocutionary force, then, can be understood as the social effect of speech, the conventional interpretation of meaning and intention. “Attitude” is, perhaps, a more slippery term. Burke himself admits that there is a certain amount of “ambivalence” to his use of the word “attitude.”¹⁶ Such ambivalence is clarified only marginally by the text of WD. Burke writes that:

the mere fact that I have a pronounced attitude towards something and want you to share it with me is no guaranty at all that my way of expressing the attitude will be the best way of getting you to share the attitude. But whatever the differences between a one-way or a two-way kind of attitudinizing in my speech act, in either case my speech act involves correlative behavior in the realm of motion.

Regardless of what attitude any speech act “symbolizes,” it can be enacted only insofar as there are corresponding neural motions of the body (whatever they may be). And whatever attitude (response) such a “rhetic” structure of utterances (locutions) may evoke in a hearer, they will necessarily be paralleled somehow in the realm of wordless (nonconventional, nonsymbolic) motion. (WD 165)

Burke uses attitude as something that speech must “symbolize,” suggesting that attitude is a concept to be embodied, something non-tangible. He then points out that attitude in the hearer will be “paralleled somehow in the realm of ... motion,” which implies that attitude is symbolic and must be paralleled. Attitudes seem to function much like “symbolic action” does in relation to motion:

Speech acts are illocutionary attitudes; all such are grounded in the speechless behavior (motions) of the body; speech acts are not reducible to terms of the body's motions, but we can inquire into their modes of motion, which are quantifiable in such terms as brain waves and endocrine secretions, though as acts they are wholly qualitative.

Even aside from the analysis of brain waves and endocrine secretions, Burke does not seem to be suggesting that measurements of motion-phenomena are insignificant or subjective. He does conclude that attitudes, like actions more generally, are based in and composed of motion, but are not reducible to it, and are thus in the realm of action:

For the “act” of speaking (and of interpreting an utterance) is made possible only by its grounding in two aspects of motion ... When “illocutionary force” (which I would equate with “attitudinal slanting”) is viewed thus, a notable principle of duality enters the case.

The duality Burke mention, however, the “absolute split” that he calls for between motion and action, does not preclude an analysis of motion as a contributing factor in speech acts.

Indeed, Burke gives a number of examples to suggest that the full meaning of a given utterance must be understood not only in symbolic terms, but also in physiological ones. For instance, he proposes an example wherein “mine enemy referred to me in utterances (a rhetic act) the attitude, or illocutionary force, of which I found quite irritating” (166). Burke describes the bodily response to his enemy's words (increased blood pressure, fast heartbeat, adrenalin) as “body symptoms” without which “his attitudinizing couldn't have had such an illocutionary force” (166). This description of bodily “behavior” highlights the role that motion plays in the interpretation of a given speech act. Rather than casting the physical world as simply the

medium for a given message, Burke acknowledges that physiology (and other environmental factors) play a significant part in the creation of meaning.

By placing more emphasis on the principle of individuation (motion), Burke gives more credence to the idea that each individual's experience is irreducibly his or her own. Burke also suggests, in WD, that there are quantitative phenomena available for study that could conceivably help us understand how humans function symbolically. Indeed, one of Burke's final claims in WD is that "only an out-and-out, formally dramatic nomenclature sets the conditions for inquiries into the sheer bodily equivalents of the speech acts' attitudes, a realm of quantification such as the corresponding qualitative nature of the speech act decidedly is not" (167). The vocabulary of motion and action allows for a discussion of speech acts that considers not only their causes in the realm of symbolic convention, but also their physiological basis, so that the two types of causes can be considered side by side, at the same time.

Conclusion

What is the significance, for Burke scholars, of understanding motion/action as a truly dualistic system? One consequence must be that nonsymbolic motion is acknowledged as a powerful force in any given speech situation. While the motion/action theory does presuppose that humans have no unmediated access to reality (humans *know* things through *action*, through language), Burke stresses the influence of motion on action, in order to highlight the extent to which non-linguistic, nonsymbolic phenomena influence language use. Robert Wess suggests that in his later work "Burke directs attention to the limits as well as the reality of rhetoric" (112). I am arguing that Burke did more than acknowledge the "limits" of rhetoric: his analysis

of motion, and the dualism of the motion/action system, emphasizes the influence that motion asserts over any rhetorical situation.

One example of an analysis affected by the proposal that Burke is a dualist is that of Bryan Crable, in his essay “Symbolizing Motion: Burke’s Dialectic and Rhetoric of the Body.” Crable argues that “the difference between action and motion boils down to that between the ‘physicality’ of a thing and that ‘physicality’ *as it is symbolically delimited and entitled*” (125). Crable goes on to suggest that Burke distinguishes motion from action primarily in order to highlight the discursively constructed nature of reality itself (simply by discussing “reality” in a language, a symbolic form, we are already constructing it). Crable argues that “Burke, rather than offering up a particular division of symbolic from nonsymbolic, instead calls attention to the process by which we distinguish the two” (126). If Crable is right, then Burke’s discussion of motion is only meant further to illustrate the fact that motion is always inaccessible except through action. Burke’s discussion of motion, action and attitude (as demonstrated above) calls Crable’s theory into doubt, however. Burke’s development of motion and action is best read as an acknowledgment of the material world and its effect on language use, rather than as a regression to the solipsism of discursive relativism. That acknowledgement particularly takes the form of Burke’s discussion of Behaviorism.

Shortly before publishing “Words as Deeds,” Burke had published a review of the first part of B.F. Skinner’s autobiography, *Particulars of my Life*. Burke’s review was just the latest in a series of engagements with behaviorists, whom Burke repeatedly criticized for being too reductive. Behaviorists, according to Burke, denied the possibility of a realm of symbolic action that could not be quantified, locating the whole of human activity in material causes and effects, in the realm of nonsymbolic motion. Robert Wess points out that Burke’s reactions in this

context represent the opposite use to which Burke is currently put, due primarily to a change in theoretical orientation. Wess suggests that

today, it's easy to say that there is a constructive ingredient in our 'realities,' perhaps too easy. To us, it's hard, if not impossible, to see past rhetoric. Burke's situation was the opposite. His polemic with behaviorism is a strategy for establishing a beachhead for constructionism in a hostile environment, one in which it was hard to see rhetoric in the first place (111).

However, while Burke did not approve of the way in which the Behaviorists denied the possibility of human agency, he appears to have wanted to pursue a similar line of reasoning. In fact, in a letter to Richard Gregg, Burke suggests that in his review of Skinner "you'll see (as also in my comments on Austin) how I am quite close to Behaviorist interests, despite my adamant insistence upon a categorical distinction between 'nonsymbolic motion' and 'symbolic action,' the distinction that Behaviorists totally obliterate."¹⁷ For Burke to align himself so closely with the Behaviorists indicates that his struggle to emphasize the importance of symbolic action (and thus the "beachhead for constructionism" Wess mentions) eventually gave way to a desire to point out the importance of nonsymbolic motion. Although clearly Burke favored symbolic action as the primary object of his studies for much of his career, both "Words as Deeds" and "(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action" demonstrate a renewed commitment to looking at language production as a combination of symbolic and nonsymbolic influences.

Motion and action are terms fundamental to any understanding of Burke's work. An argument concerned with correctly interpreting the meaning of these terms will necessarily have larger implications for the application of Burkean theory. Rather than attempting to revise away aspects of the motion/action theory that are troubling or difficult to understand, scholars might

instead look more closely at what Burke himself said, and attempt to understand it as part of a complex description of language's relationship to non-linguistic phenomena. Doing so will lead to better understanding of the motion/action theory and of how those terms relate to the larger implications of Burke's *oeuvre*.

¹ For various uses of this concept see, e.g., *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, 8-33; *Attitudes Toward History*. 196; or Burke's last book, *Language As Symbolic Action*.

² Burke claims, in *A Grammar of Motives*, that the terms "motion" and "action" are taken from George Herbert Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society* and *The Philosophy of the Act*. Burke first uses the term "motion" in a 1942 essay, "The Study of Symbolic Action" *Chimera* 1 (1942): 7-16. He does not devote any significant amount of space to explaining the term, however, until much later in his career.

³ *Dramatism and Development*. Barre, MA: Clark UP, 1972.

⁴ See, e.g., "(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic)Action." *Critical Inquiry*, 4 (1978), 811-14.

⁵ Hereafter referred to as NMSA.

⁶ Stephen Bygrave (83-84) points this fact out in his 1993 book, *Rhetoric and Ideology*. Bygrave, however, does not do much with this evidence, focusing instead on the history of "attitude" and its apparent equivalence with "ideology."

⁷ Wess discusses the similarities and differences of Burke's and Austin's philosophies of language in *Kenneth Burke: Rhetoric, subjectivity, postmodernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

⁸ "Words as Deeds" (hereafter referred to as "WD") was published for the first (and only) time in *Centrum: Working Papers of the Minnesota Center for Advanced Studies in Language, Style, and Literary Theory*, 3.2 (1975). The journal was back-dated, however, upon publication. Burke did not actually finish the essay until January of 1977, shortly before the issue of *Centrum* was printed. "Words as Deeds" was one of the last works Burke published before "(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action," in 1978.

⁹ See, e.g., “Dramatism and Development,” or “(Nonsymbolic) Motion/ (Symbolic) Action.”

¹⁰ The importance of “motive” to Burke’s scholarship should be self explanatory; two of his best-known works were titled *A Grammar of Motives* and *A Rhetoric of Motives*.

¹¹ Henderson also points out that: “It is worth remembering, however, that while the difference between these two realms is conceived as being qualitative, the symbol-using animal is in no position to make absolute distinctions (except in theory)” (138).

¹² From the personal correspondence of Michael Hancher. Burke to Ms. Taranto (Michael Hancher’s secretary), January 27, 1977: “Though I spent more time on this piece than I had the slightest intention of doing, I am glad that I was asked to write on the subject of Austin’s How To. It’s an exceptional book—and I had not known of it, though I should have.” I would like to thank Michael Hancher for the generous use of correspondence between himself and Kenneth Burke, sent to me by email on 5 December, 2005.

¹³ From the personal correspondence of Michael Hancher. Hancher to Burke, April 29, 1976: “I am writing, today, to Oxford University Press, asking them to send you a review copy of the new edition of Austin’s How to Do Things With Words.”

¹⁴ From the personal correspondence of Michael Hancher. Hancher to Burke, April 29, 1976.

¹⁵ Austin often uses “utterance” as the irreducible basic unit of a speech act. By utterance he seems to mean simply the use of vocal chords to make noise that resembles speech. I take it that Austin means his utterances to include noises that sound like syllables, parts of agreed upon symbol systems, but not necessarily to include non-linguistic noise-making.

¹⁶ Burke suggests that in Austin’s work “we confront important dramatisitic considerations to do with the relation between acts and the attitudes of agents. And as I read Austin, he has offered some remarkable contributions to that aspect of the subject. As I see the issue, he has introduced a wealth of accurate discriminations into an area which is implicitly ambivalent.” Burke then describes one section of *Grammar of Motives* as “point[ing] up the ambivalence in the concept of ‘attitudes’” (WD 153).

¹⁷ From the Kenneth Burke Papers, Rare Books and Manuscripts Room, The Pennsylvania State University. Burke to Richard Gregg, May 14, 1977. Richard Gregg was a Speech Communications professor at Penn State.